



# COUNCIL PRESIDENT **BEN HUESO**

## District Eight

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## State of District Eight Address

March 5, 2009 at 6:00 p.m.  
Casa Familiar Civic & Recreation Center  
212 East Park Avenue San Diego, CA 92173

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Welcome

Good evening, buenas noches, bienvenidos and thank you for coming. Special thanks to Kevin Faulconer, our City Council President Pro Tem, for serving as Master of Ceremonies. Kevin is a tremendous asset to this city, a tireless promoter for his district, and a friend. In January, when I helped kick off San Ysidro's Centennial Celebration, I realized that this historic, cultural border community would be the perfect backdrop for a State of District Eight event.

Over the past few months, President Obama, Governor Schwarzenegger, the San Diego County Supervisors, and Mayor Sanders have discussed the challenges facing our country, state, county and city.

Tonight, you will hear about **our** neighborhoods, where we have chosen to live and raise our families. I will talk about what we have accomplished on your behalf this past year. Fortunately, there is much good news to report. On a somber note, I will discuss our city's current economic and environmental challenges. They are unprecedented in recent history.

Over the next few months, we will talk about whether our city government has the resources necessary to meet these challenges. The decisions we make as a result of these discussions will have tremendous impact on our future quality of life.

My priorities for our district reflect my understanding that people are suffering due to job losses and foreclosures and they incorporate my commitment to protect the environment.

## My Vision

Speaking of my priorities, my overarching goal is to ensure your life as a District 8 resident will be better tomorrow than it is today. I have a vision for our city and see potential for each of our neighborhoods to improve. Through our combined efforts, we will one day be able to say – with confidence –

**The City of San Diego is financially stable, environmentally sound, and moving in the right direction. City government is trusted, fair, collaborative, and efficient. Citizens of San Diego are proud of their government.**

That's it. Simple? Yes. Optimistic? Yes. And importantly, I believe it is achievable.

## My Leadership Roles

When you elected me as your council representative, I promised to improve our neighborhoods. I am keeping that promise with a hands-on approach to resolving all levels of community concerns.

On the political front, I am achieving this goal by assuming greater responsibilities. Citywide, I was elected by my peers on the council to serve as City Council President. This position gives me a larger platform to advocate for the economic resources that have so often been overlooked in my neighborhoods.

Over the long term, prosperity is possible, and I believe that all residents should enjoy the benefits. After all, government has the responsibility to accommodate all, not just a select few.

Because long-term planning is important in my district, I have pursued a greater role at the regional level of government. I am very proud to be the first representative from District 8 to serve on the SANDAG Board of Directors. My seat at that table gives me access to information and greater input to planning decisions that benefit us.

Statewide, I have continued my service as a California Coastal Commissioner, dealing with important land use issues relating to the coast and helping to protect our valuable and sensitive shoreline. This year, in this capacity, I voted for Lane Field, a development project that will bring 2,000 jobs to our area. I also supported a desalination plant in Carlsbad that could help mitigate the water supply issues that threaten our city's future quality of life.

Each of these responsibilities, city, regional, and statewide, complement each other and allow me to serve you better. You benefit from my increased involvement in the decision-making process because your voice is heard louder and at higher levels of government.

## 2008 Citywide Accomplishments

So, what have we accomplished in San Diego this year?

Like many municipalities across the country, our city experienced a significant economic slump this past fall. Dramatically reduced property tax revenues, sales tax revenues and Transit Occupancy Tax revenues led to a \$43 million budget deficit. We had to respond to the crisis quickly.

Though we had very little time to analyze our options, we were able to preserve core city services by prioritizing carefully. Thanks to our Independent Budget Analyst's efforts and City Council action, we kept recreation centers and libraries open. In fact, I voted to allocate more than \$180,000 citywide to restore pool hours. We found \$123,000 so we could maintain Vista Terrace's normal pool hours for the upcoming season. We have also found the money to replace the roof there.

Unfortunately, as a city we have been plagued by crises over the last few years. Wildfires, a landslide, drought..and now the economic melt-down we are currently experiencing. We've learned to respond head-on to these challenges.

In years past, underfunding of the pension threatened the city's fiscal stability. Our response to that situation now serves as an example for other cities to follow. We have taken full responsibility for the problem and found our own solution.

I am proud to say that each year since I was elected, we have made fully funded payments to both the retirement pension and the healthcare pension.

To honor agreements made in the past and prepare for the future in a fiscally prudent manner, we implemented a two-tier pension system for City employees that will save the City nearly \$23 million over 20 years.

That is not all. San Diego took a critically important step on the road to fiscal stability when the last of five annual audits was completed and both rating agency's raised our city's credit rating.

As a result, we were able to borrow money for the first time in five years. The \$157 million that we raised by selling water bonds will save the city nearly \$6 million in interest over the next 12 years. It will help to fund a wide range of water, sewer and maintenance infrastructure projects.

## Water Quantity/Quality

Speaking of water...we need to find more of it and to conserve more of it. I consider our city's diminished fresh water supply to be the greatest threat to our quality of life. We must find new and reliable sources of fresh water, and be able to access it for a reasonable cost.

In our quest for a multi-faceted solution to our water problems, we will need to aggressively and proactively explore options beyond importing from far away.

Though conservation alone cannot help us meet our needs, it is an important component. All of us need to work together to save the water we have. This past year, I reduced my personal water consumption by 25%. I encourage you to conserve wherever possible at your house.

## 2008 District Accomplishments

The problems I solve at the district level are the ones that affect you and I the most on a daily basis.

## Planning

Planning has been the emphasis of my service on the council. Strong, viable communities do not just happen – they emerge from a framework that incorporates proper fiscal management and considered neighborhood planning strategies. The San Ysidro Community Plan, which has not been updated since 1990, will get underway this year. I have allocated \$2 million for this effort and look forward to your ideas and participation. We expect this two year process to begin in June.

The Otay Mesa Community Plan update began more recently, in 2001. We have worked closely with the Otay Mesa planning stakeholders, providing technical assistance to expedite the process. The stakeholders' financial support over time is gratefully acknowledged. The final recommendation by the Mayors' office is expected to come

before council in late 2009. I will work to ensure it reflects your ideas, and incorporates a balance of industrial, commercial, and residential uses.

The big picture is important, yet the details of our lives matter, too. I'm very proud of our ability to keep up with your requests to fill pot-holes, remove graffiti, respond to lighting requests, improve parks, calm traffic and the other day-to-day maintenance that keeps our communities safe, livable and attractive. We keep the Streets Division busy. In an effort to increase vehicular and pedestrian safety, they have added angled parking, red curbs, blue curbs, green zones, changed street signs and painted crosswalks throughout the district.

Some specific examples:

- a \$418,000 allocation for traffic safety improvements at Palm Avenue and Beyer Way,
- \$4 million toward the construction of the center section of Del Sol Boulevard, and
- \$1.8 million for improvements to the Palm Avenue/805 interchange

These serve as examples of our efforts to make your life easier and our community more attractive.

We voted to install \$300,000 in new lights in San Ysidro and more lights are coming. We put \$300,000 at Camino de la Plaza to improve pedestrian traffic in a busy commercial corridor. We are in the middle of a design process to make Old Otay Mesa Road safer for the students walking to San Ysidro High School and expect to start construction on the \$2.4 million sidewalk improvements by midyear 2009. You said these were priorities, I made them happen!

I'd like to highlight another San Ysidro project that dramatically helped a community resource that provides high quality, low cost, primary health care services to South Bay residents. On paper, our \$245,000 investment to add medians and a new traffic signal on Beyer Boulevard seems like a straightforward infrastructure improvement. Yet this allocation corrected a significant problem. Before the construction, it was nearly impossible to access the San Ysidro Health Center building without jaywalking or walking an unacceptable distance to cross the boulevard legally. Now, those who need to access health care can do so safely.

## Affordable Housing

As you know, I have been an advocate for affordable housing. This year, we allocated \$9.2 million for the rehabilitation of Villa Nueva Apartments. It will be the largest affordable housing preservation project in the state of California. Additionally, we are working on a grant to ensure the units have Internet access for 1,000 residents with the hope they will be able to achieve increased participation in today's high-tech economy.

We allocated a combined \$10 million for two other affordable housing developments, including El Pedregal Family Apartments, which is scheduled for completion in July 2010, and the Verbena apartments. These three housing developments represent high quality affordable housing that will not only provide necessary housing to our residents, but will also help revitalize our neighborhoods.

## Parks and Recreation

Once they've moved into their homes, our district families and children need places to play. I will cite just a few of the many improvements we have made for our parks this year. I gave money for Beyer Street Park planning in an effort to expedite its construction.

The Montgomery Waller Park Recreation council gave us two priorities: build a parking lot to accommodate cars, build a new comfort station. We are working to provide both. We have already succeeded in accommodating more vehicles, without reducing open-space reserved for recreation by reconfiguring Montgomery Waller Park to add 43 more parking spaces and allocated \$500,000 to construct and improve the rest rooms there as well.

I have been working to push forward the construction of Riviera del Sol in Oceanview Hills and am happy to report we are close to purchasing the land which will serve as a playground for children at Dolphin Cove. After a three year struggle, I am proud to say we recently purchased the land by Oceanview Hills Elementary School for a park to serve communities near and around Del Sol Blvd.

I am diligently working on another park project for those who live in Otay Mesa and Nestor. Currently, the City owns land in front of two vacant dwellings on 27<sup>th</sup> Street that attract vandals and serve as an unsightly dumping ground. We have worked on a plan to clean the area and demolish the structures and to transform this land from a blighting

condition to a recreational oasis. I am seeking funding for the park design. I hope that we will all be very proud of the park we plan to build.

Through my involvement at Otay Valley Regional Park, I am working with the county and City of Chula Vista to complete a network of recreational trails for biking, hiking, and equestrian use. We completed a ranger station, comfort station and various staging areas that will provide all the people of the southbay, world class recreational amenities that are second to none in the county, while helping to restore this precious environmental resource. We are also working to build a 43-acre regional park that will give Otay Mesa/Nestor and Nestor residents greater field access to play basketball, soccer, football and other active sports. I would like to thank the very dedicated Citizen's Advisory Committee for all their tireless involvement in this effort. I hope residents will participate in the park planning and design process this summer.

## Public Safety

As you can tell from the range of projects, parks are a priority. You can tell by our financial commitment that public safety is, too. We are fortunate to have top-notch protection. However, it costs more than \$600 million a year to pay for those who put themselves in harm's way on our behalf. Unfortunately, the entirety of city property tax revenue in Fiscal Year 2009 – less than \$400 million – falls short of supporting this important service.

Our public safety relies on qualified personnel, and on their access to appropriate equipment. Just recently, I was able to fully staff a much-needed fire truck to Fire Station 43 in Brownfield Airport. Our public safety officers are second to none, and they rely on our help. I will continue to work to bring more personnel, and provide them with newer and better equipment.

To help individual homeowners save energy and combat cold weather, and feel safe this past year, I continued a \$65,000 weatherization program and allocated an additional \$37,000 to install security devices in your private homes. Those who might be interested should call my office for details.

Gangs threaten the stability of our families and contribute to crime in our district. I support our Gang Commission in promoting practical solutions that address the underlying causes of gangs. Safe Passages to School addresses parents' fear that their children might be recruited by gang members in their own neighborhoods. The city is also working to

bring a Mobile Resource Unit to combat gang's ability to recruit new members and protect former members as well.

Graffiti is more than an eyesore. It is criminal and a threat to public safety. This past year, I voted for a new zero tolerance graffiti law, which imposes stricter punishment for taggers, supported a \$200,000 increase in the Graffiti Division budget, and hired a full-time employee to remove graffiti. He stays busy, covering nearly 2,000 defacements each year.

I personally conduct regular graffiti inspections in the district and have seen an enormous improvement, thanks to the aggressive work of Mauricio Ortiz. Thank you for your excellent and dedicated efforts, Mauricio.

Beyond graffiti removal, I am proud of my district and do everything within my power to improve its appearance. I distributed \$100,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds toward proactive code enforcement, and \$25,000 towards a tree planting program. Lastly, our office hosted more than 12 paint outs this past year, and organized five community clean ups. We have planned another 12 for this year.

Rest assured, I will continue to emphasize public safety. While my staff conducts weekly neighborhood site inspections to find problems we can correct, your requests and phone calls continue to be the principle source of information that helps us improve our community. Thank you for being our partner in this effort. Please do not hesitate to call us.

## Environment

While we all understand the importance of the Tijuana River Valley on our neighborhood quality, very few San Diegans understand its importance beyond our borders. The Tijuana River Valley is one of the most important estuarine ecosystems in the world and one of the few Ramsar sites, which denotes its value to the global ecosystem. Both Mexico and the United States are responsible for the health and vitality of this precious resource. Together, both communities have failed to protect it. I am trying to change that.

I have joined forces with Wildcoast, Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, NOAA, FEMA, Congressman Filner, Assemblymember Mary Salas, Senator Denise Ducheny, The Coastal Commission, the Coastal Conservancy, the Mayor and Council of Tijuana, the Ambassador of Mexico, and the Mexican Consul General representative to San Diego to resolve the flooding, erosion, and contamination problems that have plagued this



valley for far too long. The problem will require years to solve but we need to begin with a plan today.

I am working collaboratively with all the appropriate government agencies to fund and complete a water quality study that will serve as a guide to restoring, preserving and protecting the valley for future years and to finally end the finger-pointing.

### Priorities for the Upcoming 12 Months

As you can see, our office has worked hard for you this year.

What is ahead?

Unfortunately, a major reality check.

The economy is our biggest challenge.

Usually, the Mayor and City Council scramble to address a \$7-10 million budget gap. This year, we are facing a \$54 million shortfall. Never in most of our life-times, has our city government faced such drastic and unforeseen revenue short-falls. For District 8 families who know how to survive on very little and to make already tight belts tighter: Being frugal, thrifty and efficient is a way of life in our neighborhoods. We must take the same approach at the city.

Our city's \$3 billion dollar-plus budget must be balanced each year. The \$1 million allocated to the General Fund is the subject of discussion and criticism because this fund must cover costs associated with the pension, public safety, streets, parks, libraries, and trash collection and other core services that we have come to depend on.

Balancing this portion of the budget is the source of our city's fiscal problems.

As residents of San Diego, you are important stakeholders and partners in our effort to promote our city's fiscal health. It is easy to say, and easy to believe, that our city has a spending problem and that we must continue to cut staff and services. Some people will take advantage of the pension fiasco to say that the city has a spending problem and not a revenue problem, just like they tell poor families that earn a poverty-level salary, that they need to learn how to save.

I implore you to evaluate this mindset, and to determine whether it is accurate. If we continue to behave as though the solution lies in merely cutting programs, we will find ourselves living in a deteriorating city that can no longer provide the quality of life we take for granted.

Our city has been experiencing declining revenue for decades, while the burden placed on our city, by unfunded federal and state mandates increased, forcing our city to steal from streets maintenance, sewer and water pipe replacements, and pension contributions, in order to prevent our tax dollars from being spent to pay fines.

We have been underwriting unfunded mandates and voting down all attempts to bring in revenue that might help to cover our escalating costs. The back-log of these projects is beginning to amass in the billions of dollars, much beyond our ability to cover from cuts alone.

We need to re-evaluate this situation responsibly to make sure we do not balance our regions needs on the backs of blue collar workers. Our city employees are already some of the lowest paid in the county, and in many cases, the entire state of California.

San Diego and San Diegans can do better.

I recognize the severity of our problems and believe we have to work together to balance our budget this year.

Every day we receive more and more requests for increased services. The backlog of maintenance projects is becoming more evident every day and our City's ability to meet the challenge is diminishing. This year, we will need to realistically figure out the best way to maintain the services we have. Everyone needs to give, and everyone needs to sacrifice. There will be short term pain, but our city's survival over the long haul depends on our realistic acceptance of these facts, and our willingness to get involved. People look toward their local government for assistance and solutions. We need to make sure that it continues -- not only survive, but to thrive to meet that challenge.

## 2009 Priorities

My priorities for the upcoming year include a focus on revitalizing the economy, promoting livable neighborhoods, and protecting the environment. I'm already working to ensure District 8 constituents receive a fair allocation of federal stimulus funds.

First and foremost, we need to get people back to work. We will be getting an additional \$4 million in Community Development Block Grant funding and intend to use this for "shovel ready" infrastructure projects.

In this environment, lost jobs, plummeting property values, and foreclosures, in our District 8 neighborhoods are ingredients for blight and decline. This climate is the antithesis of my goal to promote livable neighborhoods.

To combat this danger, I have worked to ensure that a large portion of the \$9.4 million dollars in the Neighborhood Stabilization Act will come to my district and use the funds to rebuild abandoned and dilapidated homes. The homes will then be resold to families who can maintain them properly. Local contractors, subcontractors, lenders, real estate agents and bankers will be able to return to work. Property values will stabilize and neighborhoods will return to life.

In another effort to stabilize neighborhoods impacted by the current economy, I will also seek our share of the \$2.25 billion dollars in the HOME Investment Partnerships to buy, rehabilitate, and rent homes.

We are about to utilize our share of \$281 million in Clean Water funds to implement the Clean Water Act. In doing so, we will better protect our region's waters, by addressing water quality and preventing additional pollution.

## Acknowledgements

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the community partners who attend meetings to define issues, identify solutions and implement plans. You are the backbone of District 8 and true colleagues. I respect each of you and admire your work and dedication to our communities.

Mayor Sanders and my Council colleagues also work tirelessly for the betterment of this city. It is our obligation to make the Strong Mayor/Strong Council form of government works well in accord with your directive. For this to happen, we must foster a spirit of open communication, trust, and true collaboration.

Employees of the City of San Diego are our unsung heroes. Every day, you keep us safe, pick up trash, staff libraries, recreation centers, pools, answer phones and help us solve our problems, fix streets, evaluate and approve plans, educate the public, and just plain hard work. Thank you for everything you do for this city. You are the engine that pushes us ahead.

Special thanks to everyone in my office. They take your concerns as their own and truly want to make you happy. I'd like to recognize each of them: Alonso Gonzalez, my Deputy Chief of Staff, and alternate to the Coastal Commission, Elena Burton, Diana Jurado-Sainz, Raquel Marquez Maden, Whitney Benzian, Jake van den Akker, Yolanda Apalategui, Mauricio Ortiz, Keely Halsey, and Michelle Ganon.

The dictionary does not contain enough positive adjectives for Ana Molina-Rodriguez, my Chief of Staff. She moves the City's business forward with a positive attitude and healthy perspective. She is the best public servant and leader in the business and the principal reason that I have been able to achieve our priorities. There are few opportunities to truly acknowledge her contributions and I humbly request your assistance in applauding her tireless efforts. Thank you, Ana.

One final acknowledgement must be made tonight. My wife, Laura, is with me, as always. I want to thank her for her involvement in my role as your public servant. None of this would be possible without her love and support. Public criticism is always very hard to take and she is always there to support me and build my resolve and to help me to focus on the real big picture. I am grateful to her every day.

As you know, Laura and I are District 8 constituents, too. I was raised in Barrio Logan and Logan Heights and have a lifelong association with District 8 neighborhoods. I am raising my family here and plan to stay for the rest of my life. With God's permission, we will work together as neighbors, improving our community for years to come.

Thank you for coming tonight.

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